Mt. Diablo High’s Two Grant Recipients are Cultivating Crops and Relationships in their School Garden and in their Community

“Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.”

Thanks to the generosity of CTA members, two outstanding high school educators, Cindy Gershen and Patrick Oliver, are continuing to bring action to their vision and are creating new opportunities for their students and new connections for their 114-year-old school.

The Sustainable Hospitality Pathway is part of the International Hospitality and Tourism Academy (IHTA) at Mt. Diablo High School in Concord. It is a hands-on academic program with a focus on health and sustainability in the hospitality and tourism industry.

The IHTA Sustainable Hospitality Pathway is a rigorous, relevant and innovative career-technical-education program that prepares students in the growing fields of healthy food service, agri-tourism, eco-tourism, as well as the greening of traditional tourism.

The Pathway also connects students to opportunities with local businesses, public agencies, non-profit organizations and higher educational institutions to meet the health, economic and ecological challenges of the 21st century.

Sustainable Hospitality is the business and study of providing food, lodging and unique visitor experiences that operate according to the idea of the “triple bottom line”:

1) Financial sustainability – a profitable business operation;
2) Social sustainability – respect for customers and employees;
3) Environmental sustainability – conserving natural resources and reducing environmental impacts.

Over the past few years, the teachers and their supportive administrators have forged partnerships with many outside groups, including: the Mt. Diablo USD, the cities of Concord and Walnut Creek, the Contra Costa COE, UC Davis, Diablo Valley College, the Concord Hilton, Whole Foods, the Concord Chamber of Commerce & Kaiser Permanente.

They share a passion for food preparation and environmentally sustainable farming. The teachers have created after-school, student led nutrition and cooking classes, as well as a year-round garden program, whose slogan is “Plant it, Tend it, Harvest it.” They also support the school’s Athlete Nutrition Program, as well as the MDHS Visitor Center.

The teachers lead outreach efforts on behalf of the school community to local schools, parents, and businesses, as well. They sponsor special events during the school year, including a Teacher Lunch/Building Community Program where students prepare a healthy meal for staff and teachers, as well as special events like the Mayor’s Healthy Cook-Off and Kaiser’s Dinner with the Docs.

Patrick Oliver (above right) is an Organic Farmer and Environmental Educator who teaches Science and Career Tech as part of the IHTA at MDHS. (Below left) is ROP/CTE teacher Cindy Gershen who is also a successful restaurateur (Sunrise Bistro) and founder of the Wellness City Challenge.
As CTA President Dean Vogel prepares to leave office in June, IFT asked him to reflect on his 39 years as an educator and to peer into his crystal ball to predict where public education and IFT are headed. Below are highlights of his interview:

“I think it’s pretty clear to people in CTA that I believe in the CTA IFT. The reason I spend so much time emphasizing the IFT is that it truly represents who I am and what I believe about teaching and public education.... I have never left my roots. For me, instructional leadership is the key to successful teaching and learning. Thus, there is a natural connection between the IFT and instructional leadership, CTA’s strategic plan, and organizing. I believe that if CTA is to continue to be a player we must apply our organizing expertise to creating a critical mass of instructional CTA leaders. I believe this is completely consistent with our core values as unionists and certainly with the IFT mission of teacher driven strength-based change.”

“For teachers, it is a pleasant surprise to know their union is leading the charge on educational innovation. What makes this even better is that the IFT is right there with IPD - carving out a completely new focus with teacher driven strength-based change and having a powerful influence on school improvement.”

“The IFT has the potential to ignite an educational renaissance. If you want innovation and creativity in the schools, the curriculum has to be rich and diverse and it must emphasize more than language arts and mathematics. Innovation rarely happens according to a formula and is certainly not top down. The curriculum requires less structure and more flexibility for student creativity to flourish... IFT has given us a framework but it’s now up to all of us to make this happen. Teachers have to once again become believers in themselves, each other, and their profession; they need to recognize that they do have the capacity to act.”

“Because everything we do and believe is about teachers driving the change process, a new sense of hope and possibility has been given to our members. And by focusing on talents and strengths, I believe we are in a perfect place. While there certainly are challenges, the teacher driven strength-based approach promoted by the IFT gives our members confidence in their own abilities to reframe such things as common core and take a leadership role with regard to LCAP.”

To read the complete interview, “Success Begins with Paying Attention,” please visit the IFT website: Dean Vogel interview

 Dean Vogel’s steady leadership as the President of the IFT Board of Directors has helped increased awareness among CTA members of the work of the Institute for Teaching.

He championed the inclusion of excellent practitioners as members of the IFT Board of Directors. In the picture above, Dean welcomes Eric Enriquez (left) and Michelle Ramos (right) to the IFT Board in 2013. Eric and Michelle will be joined by two more outstanding educators, Serina West of Oceanside and Adam Ebrahim of Fresno in 2015.

Dean has been a passionate believer in strength-based teacher driven change. At every opportunity, he was a forceful advocate for teacher leadership and he has worked to broaden the definition of “leader” within CTA. In the picture below, Dean introduces two leading experts on organizational change, Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan, at the March 2015 K-12 Water Cooler Convening in Sacramento.

Dean has served on the IFT Board of Directors for the past twelve years. He is pictured (below left) with Eric Heins, E. Toby Boyd and Eric Enriquez, at a 2014 meeting. Dean was an early proponent of the IFT Regional Teacher Think Tanks and a consistent advocate for turning the energy of members who wanted to “Take Back Our Profession” into an organizational reality.